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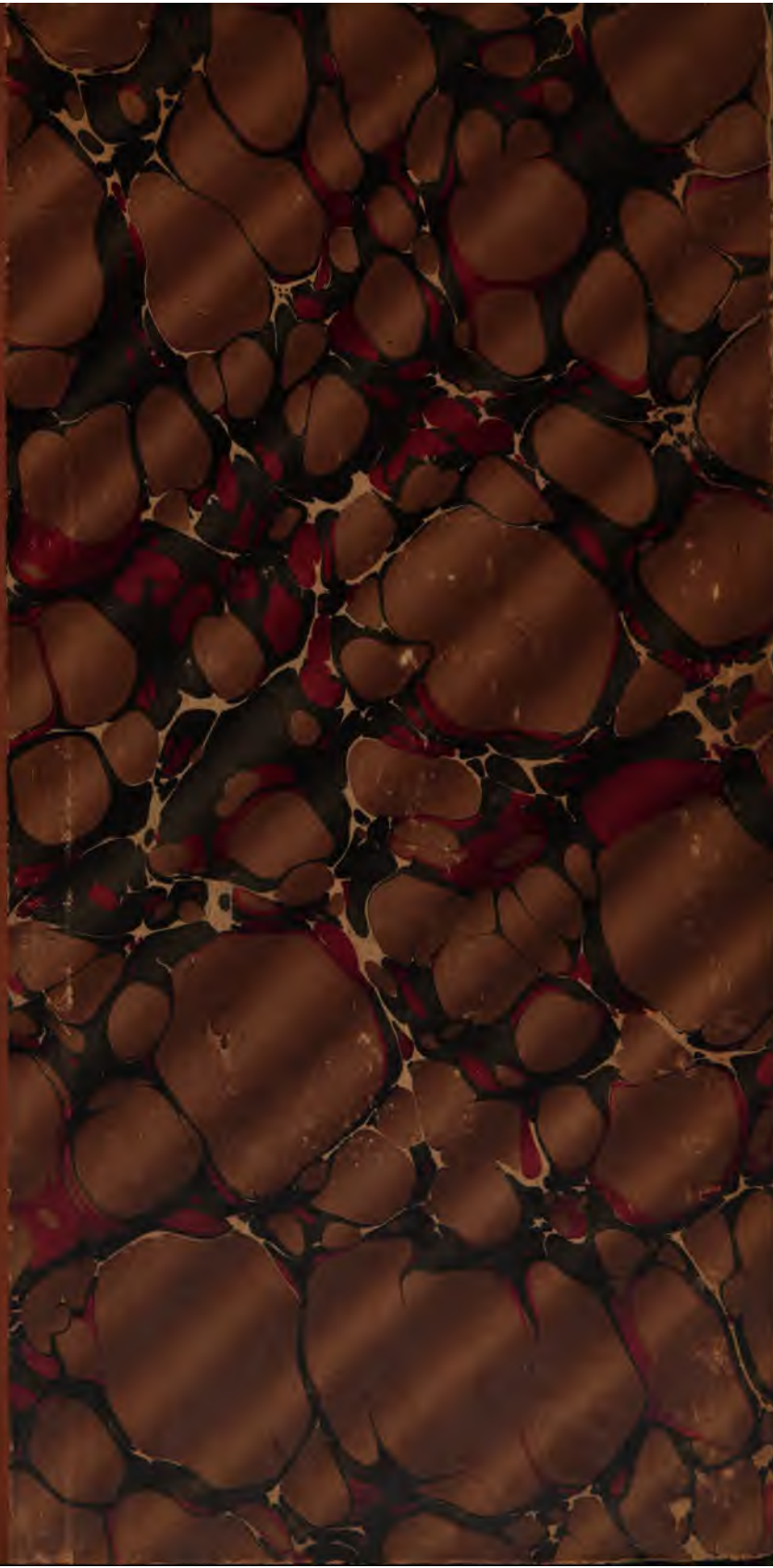
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ON DESCENDING INTO HELL:

A Letter

ADDRESSED TO THE
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CONCERNING THE
PROPOSED SUPPRESSION OF LITERATURE

BY

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"Tell me, where is the place that men call Hell ?

Meph.—Under the heavens.

Faust.—Aye, so are all things else ; but whereabouts ?

Meph.—Within the bowels of these Elements

Where we are tortured and remain for ever.

Hell has no limits, nor is circumscribed

In one self place : but where we are is Hell ;

And where Hell is, there must we ever be ;

And, to be short, when all the world dissolves,

And every creature shall be purified,

All places shall be Hell that are not Heaven.

Faust.—I think Hell is a fable.

Meph.—Ah ! think so still, till experience change thy mind."

MARLOWE'S "FAUSTUS."

ON DESCENDING INTO HELL:

To the RIGHT HON. HENRY MATTHEWS,
Home Secretary.

RIGHT HON. SIR,

You are, I understand, a Roman Catholic ; I am a catholic plus an eclectic. I have the highest respect for the creed in which you believe, since it is perhaps the most logically constructed of all human creeds ; but while I admire the logic, I do not admit all the premises, and cannot consequently follow you to all its conclusions. Is it too much to hope, however, that even Roman Catholicism has shared the fate of other beliefs, and been shorn of many of its imperfections ? Its history represents it as at once the friend of literature, and literature's mortal enemy ; it has preserved for us much that is precious, together with many husks of uncleanness which might have been more wisely destroyed, and it has formulated the Index before which, from generation to generation, Free Thought has trembled. It washed the sin-stained robes of St. Augustine with one hand, and it burned Giordano Bruno with the other. All that is over, and just now, in the 89th year of this century, Roman Catholicism

stands face to face with its old enemies, Free Thought and Science, with whom less than a miracle might even yet effect a reconciliation. For the creed of Persecution is also the creed of spiritual Insight; the carnal wolf's clothing, perhaps, still hides the Lamb of God. If in its supreme moment of eclipse, the suffering Church were to admit its sins and reform its terminology, Humanity might almost accept its blessing—forget Torquemada, and remember Bishop Myriel.

An opportunity occurs now in England. A new Inquisition, with which the Roman Church has fortunately nothing to do, proposes to shut all carnal books, and to punish all men who write, read, and sell them. For issuing to the public the writings of an able Advocate on the Devil's side, an unfortunate Publisher of Books lies now in prison. The flourishing Puritan, apt pupil of old Rome in persecution, has decided that Free Thought is to be silenced, and the Arbor Scientiæ cut down and burned. It is the story of Castilio over again, and John Calvin survives in the spirit, to make a martyr's bonfire. Now, then, I believe is the time for the Church Catholic, the Church persecuted and purified, to confess her sin, and cast in her lot with the Humanity she once hated, saying, "Even as my Saints and Monks preserved for men the banal humanities of Greece and Rome, even as (while stifling the literature of speculation) they saved for the world the literature of the flesh, letting my children nourish themselves on the bread thereof and cast the leaven away, so will I now proclaim that even the Literature

of Hell shall not be hidden quite below the depths of argument." If the Church escapes this opportunity, it will be her own misfortune; if she takes it boldly, she will gain at least one day's triumph. More than any Church still surviving, she believes that her arguments are overpowering. Since she has found it quite useless to suppress her enemies by force, why not suffer them to have their say in open daylight, before the world? By her instrument, a Roman Catholic Home Secretary, she may do this, and she will be wise to do it. Let her by your means, Sir, open the prison of one of whom those who love her not have foolishly made a Martyr. Let her proclaim from the housetops, "Men, speak out your utmost, lay bare Nature to its depths; your liberation will be my justification, for even if you descend into Hell, you will only be following my Master, who left his Cross, a flaming symbol, even *there*."

May I, as briefly as possible, review the case to which I solicit your earnest attention?

A certain

M. EMILE ZOLA,

whom superficial criticism persists in classing among the votaries of pleasure, is a dreary and dismal gentleman whose mind is solely exercised on questions of moral drainage and social sewerage. He goes so far as to assert that Modern Society is full of disease germs scattered through the air from the social deposits; and to prove his case, he takes us, when we are willing to be improved, right down into the sewers and the catacombs. I went there

lately with him ; and held my nose. The very raiment of my guide, when we emerged into the daylight, was redolent of offal ; it looked and smelt unclean, and I got away from it as soon as possible, not before I had recognised, however, that the man was right in some measure, and that the drains *were* bad. Now, it never occurred to me for one moment that poor Zola ought to be *given into custody*, but a crowd of very clean persons loudly clamoured around us, and messages were sent for the nearest policeman. Before the stern myrmidon of the law could be found, Zola had disappeared, but an unfortunate and innocent deputy, told off to conduct the public in the absence of his principal, was incontinently laid hold of by one Dogberry, haled off before Justice Shallow, and then and there condemned as a public nuisance. Moral: Leave the drains alone, let the world wag, even if typhoid fever should flourish. Moral number two, very acceptable to the average insular intelligence: conceal from all clean people, especially young people, the fact that there is such a thing as sewerage at all.

I have never held (and I do not hold now) the opinion that drainage is a fit subject for Art, that men grow any better by the contemplation of what is bestial and unpleasant ; indeed, I have always been puritan enough to think pornography a nuisance. It is one thing, however, to dislike the obtrusion of things unsavoury and abominable, and quite another to regard any allusion to them as positively *criminal*. A description even of pigsties, moreover, may some-

times be made tolerable by the cunning of a great artist, and this same M. Zola, though a dullard *au fond*, for the simple reason that he regards pigsties as the *only* foreground for his lurid moral landscapes, appears to be so much better and nobler than myself, in so much as he loves Truth more and fears consequences less, that I have again and again taken off my hat to him in open day. His zeal may be mistaken, but it is self-evident; his information may be horrible, but it is certainly given in all good faith; and an honest man being the rarest of phenomena in all literature, this man has my sympathy,—though my instinct is to get as far away from him as possible.

In trying on more than one occasion to do justice to his sincerity, while seriously finding fault with his method, I have had to be constantly reminded that he is a *Frenchman*; and a Frenchman, from our insular point of view, is synonymous with everything that is unclean and detestable. Despite the fact that we have derived for hundreds of years all our “ideas,” such as they are, from France, despite the fact that Frenchmen have been the pioneers of Freedom and Free Thought all over the world, we still preserve the old superstition that a Frenchman is born a “light” person, whose sole conception of life is derived from his experiences as a *boulevardier*. The English race has no “ideas” whatever; indeed, it abominates “ideas,” and is thoroughly practical and pragmatism in its views, of social subjects especially. True, when once convinced of a great principle, it can hold to it, as our Puritans did when

they got the lambent torch of Protestantism from Geneva, as our philosophers did when they caught the reflex of the Fiery Cross of Free Thought in Paris ; but we work by tenacity, like the bull-dog, while Frenchmen, like the greyhound, work by sight. We have had to get even our Byrons and our Shelleys second-hand from the Revolution. We have fought inch by inch against the obtrusion of every new "idea ;" then at last, accepting it, we have held to it like grim Death. Thus, in religion and even in philosophy, we have been practically converted, but on one point, that of social statics and their expression in literature, we are invulnerable. We won't be reformed in our morality. We decline to listen to anyone, especially a priest or a Frenchman, who affirms that human nature is not virtuous by instinct and by predisposition. We repudiate all "ideas" connected with the existence of moral Hell. We still our consciences, approve our Social Evil, and refuse to inspect our drains. While doing the best to give one half of the community a foretaste of Hell upon earth, we affirm that this is the best of all possible worlds, and that English civilisation is the only possible civilisation consistent with the welfare of a troubled planet.

In this spirit of disingenuous optimism, we have organised

OUR LATTER INQUISITION ;

a curious conclave, composed of all phases of character and opinion ; with Justice Shallow as chief Inquisitor, and Messrs. Dogberry and Verges as watchmen in ordinary. Decree number one : let

all "deformed" individuals, and especially all Frenchmen, be "run in" and "charged." Decree number two: books being the Devil's engines, all books are to be inspected, and if found guilty of any "ideas," summarily burnt or expurgated. Decree number three: any publisher of a book calculated to destroy our cardinal principle, that this is the best of all possible worlds, is to be seized, fined and imprisoned. Decree number four: that public virtue is impossible without the sanction of the police, and (as a corollary) that public taste is a thing strictly within the determination of the watchmen and custodians of our virtue. Decree number five: that our system of sewerage is to remain in the region of Supernatural Mystery, and that any literature touching upon it is to be condignly abolished. *Imprimantur*, the revised New Testament, the *Lamp-lighter*, and the tracts of Christian knowledge. *Condemnantur*, all poems, all fictions, which expose the Gehenna underground, or attack the moralities which shine above it. *Expurgantur*, Shakspeare, Dryden, and Byron (the last delicately, for he was a lord). Signed, Shallow, Grand Inquisitor; Countersigned, Dogberry, Chief Constable in Ordinary. In the intervals of our pleasant Inquisition, we listen blandly to a droning Military Person who beguiles our leisure with prospects of a general Conscription, and who holds up the German system of providential and governmental superintendence in all departments of life and thought, as the beacon of modern civilisation.*

* See Lord Wolseley's utterances, *passim*.

A few words concerning the character of

MR. VIZETELLY,

the imprisoned publisher, may assist you to take an impartial view of the situation. His entire life has been spent in the service of art, journalism and literature. Bound over as an apprentice to his father, James Henry Vizetelly, who had one of the largest printing businesses in the City of London, he acquired his own freedom by servitude, though members of the family had been freemen of the City for several generations. Subsequently Mr. Henry Vizetelly was apprenticed to Orrin Smith, the well-known wood engraver, and proved his best pupil; the works containing wood engravings signed "H. Vizetelly" are nowadays sought after by connoisseurs. Mr. Vizetelly's connection with journalism dates from the foundation of the *Illustrated London News*. The first "idea" of that publication germinated in the brain of Mr. Herbert Ingram, who thought of establishing a kind of Illustrated Police Gazette. Mr. Vizetelly prevailed upon him, however, to make the publication more comprehensive in its scope, wrote the prospectus, and largely contributed towards launching the first number. This was the foundation of illustrated journalism. Soon afterwards Mr. Vizetelly, having somewhat abruptly severed his connection with the *Illustrated London News*, went into publishing. He was the first to introduce *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the poems of Edgar Allan Poe to the English public. He also did a great deal

to popularize the immaculate Mr. Longfellow in England. The "*Evangeline*," illustrated by Sir John Gilbert, was due mainly to his endeavours; also the "*Hyperion*," illustrated by Birket Foster. For the latter he visited all the localities mentioned in the work (accompanied by Foster), and sketches were made on the spot to serve as illustrations. This "*Hyperion*" is very rare nowadays, and fetches a high price. About the time of the Crimean War, Mr. Vizetelly started the *Illustrated Times*, and gathered round him a number of clever writers—then mostly unknown to fame, but many of whom have since made their way in the world—Thackeray, the Brothers Brough, the Brothers Mayhew, Sala, Edmund Yates, Sutherland Edwards, Frederick Greenwood, and many others. Among the artists were John Gilbert, Birket Foster, Julian Portch, and Gustave Doré (then first introduced to the English public). Whilst starting and editing this new publication, Mr. Vizetelly devoted considerable time and energy to furthering the general interests of his profession. He acted as Honorary Secretary to the Association formed for the Repeal of the Paper Duty, and in regard to the abolition of the Newspaper Stamp he took decisive action by issuing several numbers of the *Illustrated Times* without the stamp. The Board of Revenue prosecuted him, claiming a fine of several thousand pounds. This was never enforced, however. The question was taken up by public men, and soon afterwards the Stamp impost was abolished. In 1865 he became Paris correspondent of the *Illus-*

trated *London News*—went through the siege of Paris and Commune for that journal—organised a service of sketches by balloon post, so that the paper was able to supply a more complete pictorial record of the siege than appeared in any other journal. He afterwards represented the *Illustrated London News* at Berlin and Vienna—acted as British Wine Juror at Vienna, 1873, and Paris, 1878—wrote a number of text books upon European wines, after visiting all the wine producing districts on the continent, Madeira, Canary Isles, &c. These books are standard works of reference.

As an author, Mr. Vizetelly has also written on Berlin and Paris. His *Story of the Diamond Necklace* completely unravelled what was long considered a historical puzzle—supplementing and correcting Carlyle's well-known essay in many important particulars. He has also contributed numerous articles to *Household Words* under Charles Dickens, and was on various occasions a correspondent of the *Times*, *Daily News* and *Pall Mall Gazette*. He started his present publishing business in 1880, and thereby, as I shall show, did much yeoman's service for first-class literature.

That, Right Hon. Sir, is the record of the man whom the Vigilance Committee, trading on the prudery of the English community, casts into prison. His crime is that he has not presumed the business of publishing to include the prerogatives of a *censor morum*; that he has published in the English language what nearly every educated person reads in the French; that, in a word,

he has introduced to the uninitiated the works of Émile Zola and one or two writers of doubtful morality. Even if we admit his error in this last particular, do not his long services far outweigh his indiscretions? Has he not been a brave sergeant in the army of English journalism? But I decline to admit his error. I affirm that Émile Zola was bound to be printed, translated, read. Little as I sympathise with his views of life, greatly as I loathe his pictures of human vice and depravity, I have learned much from him, and others may learn much; and had I been unable to read French, these translations would have been to me an intellectual help and boon. I like to have the Devil's case thoroughly stated, because I know it refutes itself. As an artist, Zola is unjustifiable; as a moralist, he is answerable; but as a free man, a man of letters, he can decline to accept the fiat of a criminal tribunal.

The details of an interview with Mr. Coote, Secretary of the Vigilance Committee, compel me to add a few words touching the conduct of

THE PERSON FOR THE PROSECUTION;

and to begin with, I take leave to say that Mr. Coote's assertions were simply infamous. "I think it served Vizetelly right," said this Secretary of the Vigilance Committee; "look over his catalogue, and form your own opinion." May I ask, Sir, if you *have* looked over his catalogue? I have done so, and with the following result. Besides the works of Zola, Flaubert, and Daudet, many of them admirable in every sense of the

word, Mr. Vizetelly, has issued to the English public the works of Count Tolstoï and of Fedor Dostoieffsky; an admirably edited series of the Old Dramatists; Mr. Sala's *America Revisited*, *Under the Sun*, *Dutch Pictures*, and *Paris Herself Again*; the immaculate M. Ohnet's *Ironmaster*; Mr. Greenwood's *In Strange Company*; M. Coppée's *Passer-by* (*Le Passant*); the stories of Gaboriau and Du Boisgobey; a whole library of brilliant, social romances, including tales by Cherbuliez, Theuriet, About, Féval, and Mérimée; and to crown all, his (Mr. Vizetelly's) own excellent works on *The Diamond Necklace* and *Wines of the World*. These, among other publications equally worthy and inoffensive, form the *bulk* of the catalogue for which the Secretary of the Vigilance Committee would keep an honourable man in prison. Does Mr. Coote ever *read* anything outside the literature of the *Lamp-lighter* and the *Old Helmet*? Does he see no difference between even *La Curée* or *Madame Bovary* and the sealed-up books sold sometimes in Holywell Street? It seems to me that it would be as rational to consult the first area-haunting policeman on the ethical quality of literature, as to accept the evidence of a censor who is either a mischief-maker or an ignoramus.

It is no exaggeration to say that the whole existence of the so-called Vigilance Committee is an infamy, and that the treatment of Mr. Vizetelly is merely a specimen of Dogberry's evidence and Shallow's justice. The misfortune is that Mr. Vizetelly, instead

of taking his stand like a man on his total work as publisher, pleaded in the first instance "guilty." Possibly he knew British judges and British juries better than I do ; but the result is lamentable, and I repeat my question, where is the persecution to stop ? Does any sane man imagine that it is really corrupt books that destroy society, and that any suppression of literature will make society any better ? No ; these books, where they are corrupt, merely represent corruption already existing, — are merely signs and symbols of social disease. The argument that they bring "blushes to the cheek of a young person" is irrelevant. They are not written for the young person ; and if they are, the young person will get at them, now and for ever, in spite of the policeman. Criticise them, attack them, point out their deformities and absurdities as much as you please and as much as I myself have done ; but do not imagine that you will purify the air by suppressing literature, or that you can make people virtuous by penal clauses and Acts of Parliament.

And the harmless Ohnet, and the stainless Coppée, and the good Theuriet, and the great Tolstoï, and the sublime Dostoieffsky, not to speak of the full-blooded Old Dramatists and the genial Mr. George Augustus Sala, are all practically condemned to Limbo in the lump, under the shadow of Mr. Vizetelly's awful "Catalogue" ! This precious Dogberry of a Vigilance Committee is left to straddle with his watchman's Lanthorn, and shriek "Deformed ! Deformed !" over the mutilated remains of

Art and Literature. To-morrow, perchance, he will toddle up to Burlington House, and insist on either seizing or clothing all the "improper" pictures of nude ladies, and we shall soon have the President of the Royal Academy committed to prison for daring to paint a Venus without a bathing costume or an Ariadne without a petticoat.

For my own part, I hold the matter so serious that I am appealing to you, on the highest grounds of all, religious grounds, for Mr. Vizetelly's immediate release. If there is any manhood among English writers, they will see that the matter is one involving their own liberties, now and in the near future.* If there is any consistency among English publishers, they also will contend for freedom and immunity from constabulary supervision. Special Providence, as embodied in the form of an amateur moralist-detective, is on their track. We shall see our beloved "Ouida" run in to Bow Street, and "Ouida's" publishers whimpering by her in the dock. Every publisher of the atrocious works of Shakspeare will stand in the pillory. As for Mr. Vizetelly, he may indeed have cause to cry *peccavi* if neither authors nor publishers come to his aid. He is 70 years of age, he is a *littérateur* as well as a publisher, and according to the latest accounts, he is suffering greatly. If it were only for his introduction to the public of one great and perhaps unequalled book,

* That there may be no doubt on this head, the Vigilance Committee, in a letter just published (June 25), warns English authors to "look out," and not to go too far, or they, too, may get into trouble!

Crime and Punishment, I should regard him, not as a criminal, but as a martyr and a public benefactor. Here is a good chance, Right Hon. Sir, to show that the mantle of Beaconsfield has fallen on a Tory Home Secretary! Benjamin Disraeli might have had a thousand faults, but he never forgot his literary inheritance, and in a case like the present, he would have defended the freedom of letters against a whole army of canting busybodies, and prurient "Vigilance Committee-men."

For all this civil interference with spiritual prerogative, Right Hon. Sir, must be very distasteful to the Church of which you are a distinguished representative. In matters spiritual, which to a great extent are matters literary, that Church has always upheld her own tests as final, and often, while she has burned a religious heretic, she has afforded sanctuary to a carnal offender. She trembled, it is true, before Galileo and other rectangular dogmatists of scientific discovery, but she never feared pornography, or thought that it could overthrow the higher standards of human nature. One of her most logical postulates, indeed, has been that Man is evil by inheritance and by predisposition, and that only by Faith, or Spiritual Knowledge, can he be saved. Hence her gentleness to the literature of Heathendom, her complacency in dealing with purely human Art and Letters. While preserving the Christian documents she was quite content to leave Humanity its Sappho, its Lucretius, its Juvenal, its Catullus, even its Aristophanes. For though she was persuaded

to make short work of schismatics, who after all little knowledge of life, she was ever kindly to the people, the most incontinent of whom knew life thoroughly. She went with Dante into Hell, and she ascended with Calderon up to Heaven; but loving also her cakes and ale, she preserved the *gaudriole*, for the amusement of her monks. She has, in short, been a friend to *les belles lettres*, even the most pornographic. In these respects, in many others, I sympathise with her. Far less humane and sympathetic has been her gloomy half-sister, Protestantism. If Protestantism had its way, we should have no books except One, which is excellent, no doubt, but not always amusing. In a word, this is a quite tenable proposition: that Literature has more to fear from the Church which canonizes and exalts one Book, than from the Church which asserts that Human Nature shall be at the mercy of *any Book whatsoever*.

The days are long past when even the Church, Roman and Catholic, had any real cause to be afraid of her flights of fancy, or any anxiety to suppress them: more than one of her monks have chuckled over Pantagruel, and I know that certain of her priests have followed with feverish anxiety the temptations of a certain *Abbé* Mouret. Putting certain little fanciful dogmas aside, the Roman Church is far more tolerant to human necessities and human weaknesses than any of her offshoots—more than even her grim Arch Enemy, the Church of Science, and than this last Church she is in one respect infinitely wiser, that her last word is one of pity and comfort to human backsliding.

The pity of Science is the pity of Despair ; the pity of the Church is the pity of Faith and Hope, and of regeneration.

True, you say as of old, " Unless a man believes in my confession of faith, he shall surely perish—but if he believes he shall be saved," an assumption which scientists amuse themselves with, to their own final consternation. For translated into the language of common sense, your dogma means that foulness, sin, physical disease, hereditary taint, have no power to touch the Soul,—that he who believes in the Supreme Love and Pity shall, despite them all, save his Soul alive; whereas that other Church of Science teaches what I contend to be a foolish heresy, that the Soul can be saved only by the Body in which it dwells, that by the law of heredity the Body may destroy and eliminate even Man's immortal part.

As I write, an illustration comes to my hand. A certain Scandinavian writer, who is to M. Zola what the dustman of a suburb is to the scavenger of a city, has written a play called *Gegangere*—that is, in French, *Revenants*, and in English, *Ghosts*. To get his material, he had literally, like others before him, to enter Hell, nor do I blame him, though I doubt his moral. Picturing an individual whose nature is poisoned through and through by hereditary taint, who is morally and physically diseased because he inherits from an unclean paternity, he leaves this individual in the corruption of hopeless idiocy, gibbering at the Sun. No one ray of Hope brightens the tableau, but the cruel consuming

Sun drinks up this wasted life like a drop of dew. A solemn and an awful truth, says Science. But apart from the question (never yet fully reasoned out by physiologists) of how far the spark of life *eludes* the taints cast upon it, of how far, for example, even the loathsome sores of syphilis may be crystallised after a generation into cells of prismatic thought (as is possibly true in certain examples of meningitis), the lesson we are taught in this doleful drama leaves moral questions entirely within the domain of *physiology*. Now, I, personally, refuse to exist in that most melancholy domain; and here, again, human evidence is with me. One miserable infant, almost a foetus in size and development, became the Arouet whose voice rang round the world and liberated Calas. The strumous Keats faced the Sun, and cast it glaring on his canvas as Hyperion. Unhealthy men, tainted men, weakly men, have dominated the world of art and literature, where Michael Angelos and Benvenuto Cellinis have been the exceptions. I have known a man reduced by the fault of his progenitors to a state bordering on intellectual imbecility, and yet that man was sane and wise, a beautiful soul, happy, and a peacemaker. I decline, then, to believe that Original Sin and Hereditary Taint, though they exist loosely in your dogma and tenaciously in that of Science, can cast me down into nothingness. I *know* the Soul eludes the Body at every stage of our development. I find every day that perfectly balanced structure, the *mens sana in corpore sano*, utterly deaf to the music tainted and unbalanced structures hear.

A perfectly healthy man is frequently a monster, generally a mere machine; and not till that boasted body of his is twisted and tortured, carbonadoed and shaken to pieces, does he become humanised.

Now, why should the Church, which goes as far as this with me, and declines to accept any text but that which is spiritual, fear

THE DEVIL'S EVIDENCE,

the argument for the Body, the special plea of cheap Science? If the Church does not fear it, the new Inquisition does. A Vigilance Committee casts Mr. Vizetelly, the publisher, into prison, for simply permitting a scientific scavenger to produce his frightful documents; while a no less vigilant Lord Chamberlain refuses under any circumstances to let *Gegangere* be performed in English upon the English stage. No; these things must be veiled, the argument on the other side must not be stated, the descent into Hell must never be alluded to, except by those who are supposed to keep the Keys. Surely there is no truth which Science or Art can bring to light, which Infallibility should fear? Surely Satan should be permitted to argue out his case? "No," says the Vigilance Committee and the Lord Chamberlain, "no, a thousand times; since sewerage is a Mystery, and children and young persons might overhear the argument and be contaminated—that is to say, converted." A foolish fear! a feeble superstition! The argument will out somehow, in spite of all Inquisitions. Human nature

will not suffer its own salvation or damnation to be discussed *in camera*. The matter must be fought in open day.

Sometimes, Right Hon. Sir, your Church has feared the truth, and on every occasion when she has done so, the result to herself has been lamentable. Yet it is to the Truth, the Eternal Verity, that she makes her appeal, pledging herself to its infallibility. Now, I could go through her dogmas one by one, and show that they are constructed impregnably on the instincts of human nature; only she herself, unfortunately, has misunderstood them, and hence the hideous historical record which constitutes the popular indictment against her. Yet, amid all follies, all contradictions, all cruelty, all schism, she has kept one particular glory—her patience with physical deterioration, her Faith that *no carnal sin or carnal knowledge can really wreck the Soul*. She has often been afraid of phantoms of her own conjuring, never of flesh and blood; “ideas” have terrified her, but men and women have always been her sympathetic study.

In that masterpiece of English eloquence, the *Areopagitica*, the trumpet note of which is now faintly heard in literature, our great Epic Poet has marshalled every argument, produced every proof, in favour of the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing. Nobler words never flowed from the lips of man. Wise on this as on all other vital questions, Milton, a Greek god in the thin robes of a Puritan, through which his roseate nakedness shone in celestial beauty, spoke more than one word for the

poor Devil. *He*, at least, knew that there is weakness in Humanity as well as strength, and that the primitive instincts are perennial; for had he not painted Eden on Adam's marriage day, when

"To the nuptial bower
He led her blushing like the morn,"

and had he not pictured to us the amatory exploits of Zephyr and other kindred spirits? True, he appears to reserve to his friends of the Parliament the right of destroying such books as are wholly prejudicial to decency and harmful to the State; "and yet on the other hand," he adds, "as good almost kill a good man as kill a good book: who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image, but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God as it were in the eye." Even as the holy Chrysostom nightly studied Aristophanes, so did the blameless Milton nourish his mind on the still more scurrilous pages of our own comedians. "I cannot," he contends, "praise a fugitive or cloistered virtue; assuredly we bring not innocence into the world, but impurity much rather: that which purifies us is trial, and trial is by what is contrary." "Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste that came not thither so."

Who is to decide for us what is good, if our own nature and inspiration are powerless to help us? Is it to be the Pope of Rome, or any deputy Cardinal, or

any Scottish Elder of the Kirk, or some member of a newly created City Council, or, finally, Mr. Justice Shallow of the law courts? There are zealots who would burn the works of Shakspeare, as there were zealots who cursed and anathemized the works of Burns. To a certain order of intelligence, *all* literature is profane, dangerous, inexpedient. Large portions of the community believe any stage play whatsoever is an abomination; large portions warn us that the reading of any work of fiction or fairy tale is sinful and pernicious. Whither then might we turn for guidance, if not to the Supreme Church which, after burning her own effete Index, may affirm the perfect

LAWFULNESS OF ALL HUMAN EVIDENCE,

knowing that she can, by the strength of her adamantine logic, refute every carnal lie?

I can assure you, Right Hon. Sir, that it is in no spirit of levity that I, who have little love for Roman Catholicism, suggest a way in which the Church Infallible may yet be saved. That way is, as I have suggested, to perform a latter miracle, and cast in her lot with the Church of Free Thought and Free Speech. For I regard this proposed Suppression of Literature as an encroachment of Puritanism (which has always hated literature) on the one hand, and of Pragmatic Science upon the other. Puritanism affirms with gloomy pertinacity that we are lost if we are not strictly moral, *i.e.*, moral from the puritan point of view; Science avers with vehemence

that its raw and half-verified discoveries are to regulate the conduct of our lives, and promises, if things are so ordered, that Humanity will in due course, after an era or two, arrive at the perfectly balanced Mind in the perfectly balanced Body,—a Teutonic condition to be found even *now* in the Fatherland! Neither Puritanism nor Science, however, affect the Church's prerogative by one hair. The one takes too much care of our conduct, the other is too anxious about our health. The Church alone, at this supreme crisis, when an innocent man is cast into prison, when the suppression of literature is threatened, and when neither Puritan nor Scientist cares to utter one word of public protestation,—the Church alone, I say, can command the situation, and deny the right of synods or vestries to silence any voices, even those from Hell. Her spiritual terminology is, after all, far nearer to the pantheism of Servetus, than to the dismal anthropomorphism of John Calvin. "I have no doubt," said the Spaniard, "that this bench, this table, and all you can point to around us is of the substance of God;" adding, when it was objected that on his showing the Devil must be of God's substance too, "I do not doubt it; all things whatever are part of God, and Nature is his substantial manifestation." For which and other pestilent heresies, Servetus, to the huge joy of John Calvin, was burned alive, roasting first for two hours in the flames of a slow fire, and begging piteously that they would put on more wood, or do something to end his torture.

Now, all such cruelties and abominations, together

with all the schisms and heresies of the Churches, have arisen (1) from the human anxiety to be too rectangular, too *scientific*, and (2) from the disposition of novices in discovery to force their opinions upon their neighbours. Just as little as Metaphysics could tell the Church of the real nature of God, while tempting its hearers to tear the human images of God asunder, can Physical Science tell us of the real nature and destiny of Man. Humanity, at the present issue, pines to free itself from *all* sacerdotal assumptions; it yearns for the liberty to enquire, in its own way; and it is out of lay books, to no little extent, that its knowledge must be derived. *Das mehr Licht hereinkomme!* it cries with Goethe, the Pagan. Just as certainly as the light which leads astray may (as Burns protested) be "light from Heaven," so may the light which guides and saves be light from Hell. To drape one half of the human figure is not to prove the whole structure to be celestial; to ignore the existence of Evil is not to ensure the triumph of Good. The literature of Hell is God's literature too.

How well has suppression worked in other countries? Take Italy, for example, a country of which both Providence and Priesthood have taken such particular care; the chosen home of the Index and the winking Virgin; the region of Pompeii and of *oggetti osceni*, into which neither women or children are suffered to enter? There, obscene things are carefully hidden, literature is wistfully burked,—with such stupendous good to the community that dirt and disease and libertinage flourish up to the very gates of the Vatican. Then take

France, with which Providence has always been in more or less of a temper, where literary freedom has run to licence, and where Art is synonymous with independence, not to say looseness, of morality. In France, the domestic affections flourish to wonderment, and the idea of family relationship is strangely sacred; insomuch that even in polluted Paris, on the stage, the one sentiment which "brings down the house" is the sentiment of parental or filial love. Then take Germany, strangled by the governmental Providence, and reaching to its apex of licensed infamy in Berlin: a free nation without a free thought, smothered by its own strength of Nationality, straddled over by a Martinet of pipes and beer; the Fatherland which every German adores, and escapes from at the first opportunity. Then take England, still free, in spite of the god Jingo; still merry, in spite of the Rev. Mr. Grundy and his wife; yet the chosen home of the "young person," the land where literature is under the protecting wing of Mr. Mudie and where the moribund drama gasps and struggles Desdemona-like under the smothering pillow of the blindly jealous Lord Chamberlain. It is with England, of course, that the present inquiry is most concerned. With a literature unequalled for breadth and power, with Shakspeare throned and crowned, and Milton uttering the trumpet notes of freedom, England still languishes without ideals or ideas. She has had her Jonathan Swift and her Henry Fielding, but she has never had her Rousseau,—never possessed one man since Milton to stand fearlessly between the

two opposing forces of Superstition and Freedom, and to utter the gospel of reconciliation ; to denounce the Priestcraft of Religion with one breath, and the Priestcraft of Science with the next ; to go down into Hell's most sulphurous depths, and to learn that the only light even *there* is Light reflected from Heaven.

For nothing in your religion, right hon. sir, is so beyond contention as the dogma that Hell is ; a belief which you share with your gloomy Sister. It remained for a great thinker, Emmanuel Swedenborg, to establish the fact that Hell is not merely a locality, but also an omnipresent "condition." I know scarcely one great English classic, from *Othello* to *Tom Jones*, from *Tom Jones* to Burns' *Address to the Deil*, which has not illustrated the theory that

HELL EXISTS,

and that the Devil, who is often very humorous and entertaining, should have a hearing. Since we have adopted Satan's original suggestion, and eaten of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, I do not think we can alter our food *now*, and get back to the ambrosia of Eden. The fact that, ashamed of our nakedness, we have made ourselves an apron, does not justify us in covering all our flesh with old-fashioned steel armour. The knowledge we have secured, at the cost of our innocence, is not to be ignored. The freedom we have gained, at the price of our moral peace, is not to be abandoned. In other words, we cannot save ourselves *now* by ignorance, nor can we be saved by providential suppression. Every

man who would be strong for the world's fight must visit Hell, and become acquainted with its literature ; when he is certain to discover, if my own experience is any guide, that the angels there are real, though fallen.

Even this same Zola is a prophet after your own liking, if you will only bear with his banalities. He prophesies Death and Doom, if purity and self-sacrifice do not arise again to save the world. His text is older even than your Church,—“the wages of Sin is Death.” He takes us from deathbed to deathbed : some vile and loathsome, like that of poor Nana, some divinely beautiful, like that of little Jeanne. There is a saint and a martyr even in that hotbed of pornography, *Pot Bouille* ; and when I think of the poor blind bourgeois father, copying folios for a few pence that his wife and daughter may wear finery, and then dying broken-hearted when he finds all his life is founded on corruption, I weep at another Crucifixion. To state this, is merely to contend that fine things may be found even in an Inferno : that Proserpine's flowers did not all fall on the ground from Dis's waggon, but that some were borne with her right down into Hades. Surely Zola should content those who believe in corruption and deterioration. The Gospel according the Sewers is *your* Gospel of Original Sin. The scientific dogma of hereditary taint is *your* dogma of the Fall. True, in many particulars, your creed is the nobler, and will last the longer. You tell us that we may be saved by Faith, redeemed by obedience to the primal Law,—and so, indeed, we may. But we shall never be redeemed by closing up all books, by pretending (in the

face of our knowledge to the contrary) that there is no such thing as Sin at all.

The point for which I have always contended is that both cynical pessimism and coarse realism are alike infinitely *absurd*. A thoroughly unclean book is almost invariably a thoroughly foolish one. Zola, for example, is, at his coarsest, merely a subject for laughter; the dirt sticks to him who writes, not to him who reads, and makes the writer look ridiculous. The sense of the absurd, in fact, is the *granum salis* which keeps literature wholesome. Even *Justine* becomes innocuous, even Petronius becomes harmless, when so disinfected. Yet when I look at Rabelais in his easy chair, I need no grain of salt, for I am thinking only of the broad humanity of the man. Even Sterne's dirty snigger is forgotten in his quaint humanities. *Nihil humani a me alienum puto*; nothing in literary humanities injures me one hair. My eyes are yonder on Mount Pisgah, and though I yearn for the region of stainless snow, I know my way lies through this mud.

In all these respects, and in others, I follow the Roman Catholic Church. There is only one difference between us, that while she fears one form of Rationalism, that which deals with certain dogmas and symbols for which she has an insane though natural affection, I, adding eclecticism to catholicism, fear no doctrine, no book, and no man. I shall say my say for or against the Devil, as any free man has a right to do, but I shall never contend that he has no existence.

In this our England, we have numerous priesthoods or deputy Providences, without counting the sad and cloistered priesthood of old Rome. We have, for example, the priesthoods of Episcopacy, of Dissent, of Good Society, of Art and Letters (or Dilletanteism), of cheap Science, and, most potent, yet least responsible of all, the priesthood of the Stump, or Politics. Now, there is not one of all these bodies which is not thoroughly convinced that its own view of the Universe is right, which does not, when occasion offers, persecute and torture unbelievers, which would not, if suffered to do so, summon the executioner or the constable; and if these same priesthoods were to be called together in full synod, and asked to decide the fate of Literature, the general verdict would possibly be one of Strangulation or Mutilation. The clergy of all denominations hate each other, the Good Society people suppress each other, the Dilletantes detest all curtain-lifters who are not Dilletantes, and the Stump Orators are the terror and the scourge of every original thinker under the sun. All, however, are agreed on one point—that, in this most respectable country, there must be no descending into Hell, that Literature especially must be kept clean and wholesome, fit for family perusal. Hence we have been blest for many years with an expurgated literature, in the category of which, I rejoice to say, may be found such books as bring Heaven down to Earth and glorify human nature. Let it be granted, indeed, that a book founded on heavenly intuitions, such a book as the *Poems* of Tennyson, as the *Cloister and the Hearth* of

Charles Reade, as the *Esmond* of Thackeray, as the *David Copperfield* of Dickens, as the *Westward Ho* of Kingsley, as the *Lorna Doone* of Blackmore, as the *Woodlanders* of Thomas Hardy, as the *Greene Ferne Farm* of Richard Jeffries, as the *Angel in the House* of Coventry Patmore,—such a book, with the sunshine and fresh air upon its leaves,—is worth a thousand times all the Devil's documents put together. We thank God for it, and it has God's blessing. But there are moments when even the best of us crave more,—crave the bitterness of knowledge, the sight of the charnel-house, the glimmer of the deep, dim lights of Hell. For, as I have said, Hell is, and we must know it, and to know it is, in the end, to abominate and to avoid it. We are not celestial beings, yet. We are earthly and human enough to fancy that the diet of celestial beings is very often insipid. We want the records of human sin and pain. We crave for the elemental passions. We tire even of plum pudding, and thirst to eat husks with the swine. We miss the tasty leaven, in super-celestial food. And so, when we are sick of a surfeit of holiness, we turn to Farquhar for gay rascality, to Swift for brute-banality, to Byron for lightsome devilry, to Goethe for intellectual concupiscence, to Heine for the persiflage which scorns all sanctities and laughs at all the gods, and to Zola for gruesome testimony against sunlight and human nature. When this is done, after we have seen the Satyr romp and heard the hiccup of Silenus, after we have seen Rabelais charging the monks on his ass

Panurge, and left Whitman loafing naked on the sea shore, do we turn again with less appetite, with less eager insight, towards the shining documents of Heaven?

Of all the great writers who have been canonized by Humanity, there is scarcely one who, under the proposed Inquisition of Messrs. Shallow and Dogberry, would not have been "run in," pilloried, fined, or imprisoned. The author of *Pericles* would do his six months as a first-class misdemeanant, in company with the author of *Cædipus* and other foreigners of reputation. Sappho, for one little set of verses, would be tied to the cart's-tail, in company with Nanon and Mrs. Behn. In one long chain, the dramatists of the Elizabethan age would go to the moral galleys, followed by the dirtier dramatists of the Restoration. Fielding and Smollett would find no mercy, Richardson himself would only escape with a warning not to offend any more. To come down to contemporaries, I think Mr. Browning might be adjudged an offender against the law of modest reticence, and Mr. George Meredith a revolutionary in the region of sensuous passion. Not all his odes to infancy, not all his apotheosis of the coral and the lollipop, would save Mr. Swinburne. But the authors of the *Heir of Redcliffe* and *A Knight Errant* would rise up to the stainless shrines of literature, and Mr. Slippery Sweetsong might become the laureate of the new age of Moral Drapery and Popular *Mauvaise Honte*. How good then would Humanity become, bereft of Shakspeare's feudal glory, denied even a glimpse of

frisky blue stockings under the ballet skirts of Ouida. Morality would be saved, possibly. All would be innocence, a moral constabulary, and good society. We should have choked up with tracts and pretty poems and proper novelettes the mouth of a sleeping volcano ; but when *Ætna*, or *Sheol*, or *Hell*, had its periodical eruption, what would happen *then* ?

I shall not attempt in the space of a brief letter to penetrate into the *philosophy* of this great question ; but it will occur to you that Milton's famous protest against the suppression of books was echoed indirectly, centuries later, by Mill's notable plea for Liberty, in which it was contended (1) that the opinion we wish to suppress may be *true* ; (2) that it may, at any rate, contain a portion of truth ; (3) that vigorous argument concerning opinions really and wholly true is the only way of saving these opinions from becoming conventional and prejudicial to intellectual activity ; and (4) that without such argument, even good moral doctrine would cease to have any vital effect on character or conduct. I rather fear, remembering a certain estrangement which resulted from a quasi-Rabelaisian joke of Carlyle at Mill's expense, that the author of the *Essay on Liberty* would have drawn the line of indulgence at naughty books,—just as Locke did, much earlier. But these are brave words of Locke : “ It is only light and evidence that can work a change in men's opinions, and light cannot proceed from corporal sufferings or any *outward penalties* ; ” furthermore, “ the power of the civil magistrate consists only in outward

force, while true and saving religion consists in the inward persuasion of the mind, without which, nothing can be acceptable to God." Mill's main contention is that it is well or ill with men just in proportion as they respect *truth*. The main contention of suppressionist philosophers is that if the majority can crush out vice by law, it is vicious not to do it, even if a little truth has to be sacrificed too. But how shall we decide what is vicious? Shall not the history of persecution warn us to be careful how we judge? And in so far as books are concerned, is not the record of every generation filled with the names of books labelled vicious by the contemporary majority, and afterwards pronounced soul-helping by the verdict of posterity? The suppressed books form in themselves a Bible of Humanity. If it were only for the sake of one or two little chapters, say the Epistle of Shelley to the Muggletonians or the Song of Songs (not of Solomon but) of Heine, I should regard that BIBLE of HUMANITY with devout affection.

Personally, I claim the right of free deliverance, free speech, free thought, and what I claim for myself I claim for every human being. I claim the right to attack and to defend. I claim the right to justify the Devil, if I want to. I can be suppressed by wiser argument, by deeper insight, by greater knowledge, but not by the magistrate, civil or literary. I would stand even by Judas Iscariot in the dock, if his Judge denied him a free hearing, a fair trial. The Truth, if she is great as we assume her to be, must pre-

vail. The evidence of the Devil is necessary to secure the triumph of God; if it were otherwise, the Devil, not his Judge, would be Omnipotent. And the evidence which proves vice and proves virtue must be from *within*, from the Spirit which you cannot cast into prison, but which chooses not unfrequently to chain and shackle itself. Meantime, it is Mr. Coote and the Vigilance Committee, not Mr. Vizetelly, who lie in ignoble chains. We want more Light, not more Darkness; more knowledge, not more ignorance; not more government, but more freedom of speech, more production of documents, more verification. Let your Church, Right Hon. Sir, turn round upon herself and say *this*, and we shall witness the conversion of another Saul. *Help* her to say it. Justify literature, justify free thought, by releasing Mr. Vizetelly from a bondage which is an insult to literature. You have only to lift your hand. You have only to say: "God is, and He fears nothing, good or evil, that He has created." This would be the last and crowning proof of one man's wisdom; of the Church's infallibility, which is insight; of her function, which is the reconciliation and interpenetration of good and evil; and of her prerogative, which is the right of Spiritual Judgment independent of the dim and doubtful lights of the Civil Law. The police magistrate cannot save us from Evil, which is in ourselves, but, even now, Religion *can*.

In this country, I believe, only two classes are specially pornographic; those who never read at all, because they cannot or will not, and those who are suffi-

ciently wealthy to buy and read *éditions de luxe*. Mr. Vizetelly's publications cannot affect the former classes, and their existence is a matter of indifference to the latter, who finger their Casanova at leisure, and pay readily for costly works like Burton's translation of the Arabian Nights. The point of the persecution, therefore, appears to be that Mr. Vizetelly's books are sufficiently attractive and cheap to reach those classes who are pornographic in neither their habits nor their tastes: young clerks, frisky milliners, *et hoc genus omne*. Now, these people are precisely those who are robust and healthy-minded enough, familiar with the world enough, to discriminate for themselves. Whatever they choose to read will make them neither better nor worse. The milliner will frisk without the aid of a Zola, and the young clerk will follow the milliner, even within the protective shadow of a Young Man's Christian Association. Wholesale corruption never yet came from corrupt literature: which is the effect, not the cause, of social libertinage. Do we find morality so plentiful amongst the godly farmers and drovers of Annandale, or among the "unco' gude" of Ayrshire or Dumfriesshire—thumbers of the Bible, sheep of the Kirk? Stands Scotland anywhere but where it did, though it has not yet acquired an aesthetic taste for the Abominable, but merely realizes occasionally the primitive instincts of *La Terre*? Dwells perfect purity in Brittany and in Normandy, despite the fact that Zola there is an unknown quantity, and Paris itself a thing of dream? Bestialism, animalism, sensualism,

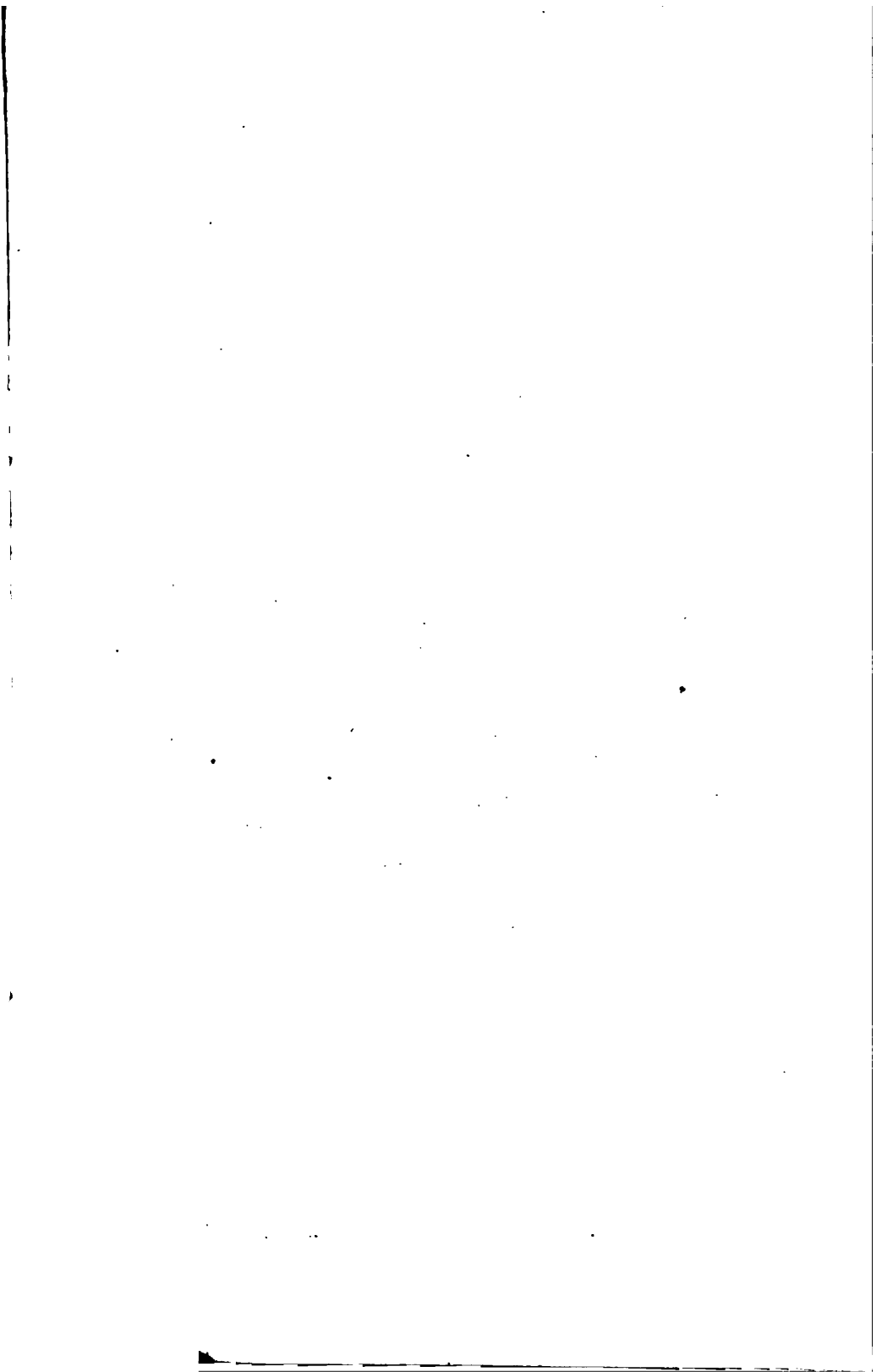
realism, call it by what name you will, is antecedent to and triumphant over all books whatsoever. Books may reflect it, that is all ; and I fail to see why they should not, since it exists. I love my Burns and like my Byron, though neither was a virtuous or even a "decent" person. My Juvenal, my Lucretius, my Catullus, and even my *porcus porcorum* Petronius, are well read. My *Decameron*, with all its incidence of amativeness, is a breeding nest of poets. Age cannot wither, nor custom stale, La Fontaine's infinite variety. But I take such books as these, as I take all such mental food, *cum grano salis*, a pinch of which keeps each from corruption. Even the fly-blown Gautier looks well, cold and inedible, on a sideboard, garnished with Style's fresh parsley. But I have never found that what my teeth nibble at has any power to pollute my immortal part. I must stand on the earth, with Montaigne and Rabelais, but does that prevent me from flying heavenward with Jean Paul, or walking the mountaintops with the Shepherd of Rydal? Inspection of the dung-heaps and slaughter-houses with Jonathan Swift and Zola only makes me more anxious to get away, with Rousseau, to the peaceful height where the Savoyard Vicar prays? By Evil only, shall ye distinguish Good, says the Master ; yea, and by the husks shall ye know the grain.

The man who says that a Book has power to pollute his Soul ranks his Soul below a Book. I rank mine infinitely higher.

ROBERT BUCHANAN.

NOTE.—Since the above letter was written, I have heard that Messrs. Vizetelly have “suppressed” their translation of Murger’s *Vie de Bohème*, a book as good and wholesome, to my mind, as life itself; and that Messrs. Chatto and Windus have burned their “stocks” of Rabelais and Boccaccio. *O tempora! O mores! O sæclum insipiens et inflectum!* What next?—and next? and next? And simultaneously comes the legislation which confines the ragged street-child to the slums, and denies it one glimpse of happiness in the wicked Theatre! Only those who really know the facts, who have been familiar with the blessing a single Drury Lane Pantomime used to bring to a thousand homes, can understand the cruelty and futility of this last example of providential legislation.

R. B.



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